

# Sri Lanka: Background and U.S. Relations

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## Summary

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, an island nation in the Indian Ocean, is a constitutional democracy with a relatively high level of development. For two and a half decades, political, social, and economic development was seriously constrained by years of ethnic conflict and war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), also known as the Tamil Tigers. After a violent end to the civil war in May 2009, in which authorities crushed LTTE forces and precipitated a humanitarian emergency in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated north, attention has turned to whether the government now has the ability and intention to build a stable peace in Sri Lanka.

This report provides historical, political, and economic background on Sri Lanka and examines U.S.-Sri Lanka relations and policy concerns. In recent years interest in Sri Lanka has focused on human rights issues related to the final stages of Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war with the LTTE, and its attendant humanitarian emergency. Sri Lanka has faced criticism for what has been viewed as an insufficient response to reported war crimes, a more nepotistic and ethnically biased government, as well as increasing restrictions on media and an unequal distribution of economic development.

Between 1983 and 2009, a separatist war costing at least 70,000 lives was waged against government forces by the LTTE, a rebel group that sought to establish a separate state or internal self-rule in the Tamil-dominated areas of the north and east. The United States designated the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997.

Sri Lanka offers a test case of how to respond to a brutal military victory over a violent ethno-nationalist separatist movement. The situation presents decision-makers questions of how to balance the imperatives of seeking accountability and resolution, providing development assistance, and promoting broad geopolitical interests. President Mahinda Rajapaksa has a firm hold on government and popular support among the Sinhalese majority for his leadership in presiding over a military victory over the LTTE. But Sri Lanka remains a multi-ethnic society, where long-held historic grievances have been deepened still further by the conflict's brutal end.

Although Sri Lanka maintains strong economic ties with countries in its close geographic proximity, Sri Lanka-India relations have been strained due to political and ethnic tensions (Sri Lanka's minority Tamils have strong linkages with Tamil communities in India), and there has been an increase in military and energy related investments from China in recent years. Sri Lanka remains the only South Asian nation with a high human development index ranking.

The United States recognizes the importance of the nation with its significant geographic positioning, and has paid close attention to human rights in the island nation. The U.S.-Sri Lanka relationship has been focused on human rights issues over the last few years, with an emphasis on U.S. sponsorship of resolutions through the United Nations Human Rights Council.

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## Historical Setting

Once a port of call on ancient maritime trade routes, Sri Lanka is located in the Indian Ocean off the southeastern tip of India's Deccan Peninsula. The island nation was settled by successive waves of migration from India beginning in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Indo-Aryans from northern India established Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms in the central part of the island. Tamil Hindus from southern India settled in the northeastern coastal areas, establishing a kingdom in the Jaffna Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Lanka was colonized in succession by the Portuguese, Dutch, and English, becoming the British crown colony of Ceylon in 1815.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tamil laborers were brought from India to work British tea and rubber plantations in the southern highlands. Known as Indian Tamils, the descendants of these workers currently comprise approximately 4% of Sri Lanka's population and are clustered in the south-central "tea country." Descendants of earlier Tamil arrivals, known as Sri Lankan or Ceylon Tamils, constitute up to 13% of the country's population and live predominantly in the North and East. Moorish and Malay Muslims (largely Sunni) account for another 9% of the population. The majority of Sri Lankans (about three-quarters) are ethnic Sinhalese, most of them Buddhist.<sup>2</sup> In 1972, Ceylon was renamed Sri Lanka ("resplendent land"), as it was known in Indian epic literature.

Although Ceylon gained its independence from Britain peacefully in 1948, succeeding decades were marred by ethnic conflict between the country's Sinhalese majority clustered in the densely populated South and West, and a largely Hindu Tamil minority living in the northern and eastern provinces. Following independence, the Tamils—who had attained educational and civil service predominance under the British—increasingly found themselves discriminated against by the Sinhalese-dominated government, which made Sinhala the sole official language and gave preferences to Sinhalese in university admissions and government jobs. The Sinhalese, who had deeply resented British favoritism toward the Tamils, saw themselves not as the majority, however, but as a minority in a large Tamil sea that includes approximately 60 million Tamils just across the Palk Strait in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu.

The Sri Lankan civil war, a separatist struggle between the two ethnic groups, lasted 26 years, ending with the Sinhalese-dominated government's defeat of Tamil separatist groups in 2009. Although there are no exact figures on the death toll, an estimated 30,000-40,000 people were killed in the war. The government of Sri Lanka has denied any accusations of war crimes and resents recent international pressure to address a more equitable economic and political structure.

## U.S.-Sri Lanka Relations

U.S. policy towards Sri Lanka has historically supported Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as its democratic institutions and socio-economic development. The United States has also supported policies that would foster inter-communal harmony and ethnic reconciliation with the Tamil minority of the country.

Since 2009, U.S.-Sri Lanka relations have centered on human rights abuses committed at the end of the civil war. Susan Rice, then the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations,

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates of the size of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka vary. The State Department Background Notes estimates the community at 18% of the total population while the CIA World Factbook estimates it to be 8.5%.

<sup>2</sup> "Quick Stats," Department of Census and Statistics—Sri Lanka, 2012, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2012Visualization/htdocs/index.php>.

welcomed the April 2011 U.N. Panel of Experts Report on Sri Lanka and stated that the U.S. supports

an effective, transparent post-conflict reconciliation process in Sri Lanka that includes accountability for violations by all parties. The report indicates the need for an independent and full accounting of the facts in order to ensure that all allegations of abuse are addressed and impunity for human rights violations is avoided.<sup>3</sup>

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake, who was also previously U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka, reportedly stated that the U.S. first looks to host governments to take responsibility for such issues but that “international mechanisms can become appropriate in cases where states are either unable or unwilling to meet their obligations.”<sup>4</sup>

In light of human rights concerns, Washington sponsored a United Nations Human Rights Council resolution in 2012, to the displeasure of Colombo, calling upon the government to provide more comprehensive action and legal support to address human rights violations during the civil war, and to address inequalities between ethnic groups in the nation. In March 2013 UNHRC adopted a U.S.-sponsored resolution which again called on Sri Lanka to address human rights concerns and to take steps to foster reconciliation.<sup>5</sup>

The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress has also expressed its views on the situation in Sri Lanka. H.Res. 247, “Expressing support for internal rebuilding, resettlement, and reconciliation within Sri Lanka that are necessary to ensure a lasting peace,” was introduced on June 4, 2013, and calls for transparency, reconciliation, media freedom, investigation into war crimes, access for humanitarian workers into war-affected regions, demilitarization, as well as the equal distribution of political power. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

## **U.S. Assistance to Sri Lanka**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has maintained a presence in Sri Lanka since 1948. A key goal of this assistance is to even the inequitable growth and development between the dominantly Sinhalese-populated and dominantly Tamil-populated provinces, specifically targeting widows, ex-soldiers, and combatants and marginalized communities for economic assistance programs.<sup>6</sup> The USAID funded projects aim for long-term, sustainable development, and include initiatives to improve democratic institutions.

USAID has especially assisted Sri Lanka’s agricultural sector, through programs focused on farmer productivity, and helping farmers market their products. Its infrastructure assistance has focused on upgrading schools and hospitals, as well as livelihood skills and the educational structures for students.

The United States also works with the Sri Lankan defense establishment through the International Broadcast Bureau (IBB), which controls a radio-transmitting station in Sri Lanka. Defense cooperation also assists technical and training opportunities for Sri Lankan defense, as well as other fields such as intellectual property rights, biotechnology, and cybersecurity.

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<sup>3</sup> Ambassador Susan Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, “Statement on the Release of the UN Panel of Experts’ Report on Sri Lanka,” New York, April 25, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> “US Wants Sri Lanka to Act First on Wartime Rights Violations,” *Reuters*, May 4, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> “Sri Lanka: Country Outlook,” *Economist Intelligence Unit*, August 21, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> “Sri Lanka,” U.S. Agency for International Development, May 8, 2013.

**Table 1. U.S. Foreign Assistance to Sri Lanka**  
By Account and Fiscal Year (\$s in thousands)

	<b>FY2012 Actual</b>	<b>FY2012 CR<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>FY2014 Request</b>
Development Assistance	8,000	*	6,000
Foreign Military Financing	500	*	450
International Military Education & Training	690	*	626
International Narcotics Control & Law Enforcement	720	*	720
Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and related Programs	3,450	*	3,080
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,360</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>10,876</b>

**Source:** U.S. State Department, "Sri Lanka," Budget Justification Foreign Operations, Annex: Regional Perspectives, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208291.pdf>.

The U.S. has most actively been involved in food security, easing cultural tensions between Sinhalese and Tamil populations, as well as promoting peaceful transitions in Sri Lankan provinces.<sup>8</sup>

#### **SRI LANKA IN BRIEF**

**Population:** 21.6 million; *growth rate:* 0.89% *Urban pop.* 14% with 1.1% annual

**Area:** 65,610 sq. km. (slightly larger than West Virginia)

**Capital:** Colombo

**Head of Government:** President Mahinda Rajapaksa (Sri Lankan Freedom Party)

**Ethnic Groups:** Sinhalese 75%; Tamils 16%; Moors 9%

<sup>7</sup> FY2013 estimates are currently unavailable as the Administration has yet to calculate effects of the sequestration and because there are no FY2013 funding levels from which to calculate across-the-board reductions.

<sup>8</sup> "Sri Lanka," U.S. Agency for International Development, May 8, 2013.

## Domestic Politics

The Republic of Sri Lanka has a multi-party democratic structure with high levels of political conflict and violence. The country's political life long featured a struggle between two broad umbrella parties—President Mahinda Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP). The president's United Freedom People's Alliance (UFPA), of which the SLFP is the main party, has consolidated power. President Rajapaksa gained widespread popularity among the Sinhalese majority for ending the war. The SLFP is viewed as being more Sinhala nationalist and statist than the UNP.<sup>9</sup>

The political divisions between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations remain serious. The government has amended the constitution to restrain provinces from merging, making it impossible for Tamils in Sri Lanka to have a majority within the regions where they currently have large populations, as well as constraining the rise of the political groups sympathetic to Tamil causes. The SLFP has, moreover, taken steps to make the central government much stronger, through proposed bills and amendments, in efforts to keep power in President Rajapaksa's government.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Lanka follows a strong executive presidential system of government. Under this French-style system, the popularly elected president has the power to dissolve the 225-member unicameral parliament and call new elections, as well as to appoint the prime minister and cabinet.

President Rajapaksa's was reelected to a second six-year term in January 2011; the current parliament was elected in April 2011. The president's family plays an important role in government. The U.S. State Department found that "both elections were fraught with violations of the election law by all major parties and were influenced by the governing coalition's massive use of state resources."<sup>11</sup> The ruling UPFA now has a significant majority in parliament. The next presidential election is scheduled for 2015 and the next parliamentary election is to be held by 2016. Given the UPFA's large majority in parliament, it is likely that it will serve out its full term.

The current government is accused of a number of serious human rights violations that have persisted since the civil war ended. They include the targeting, surveillance, and limitation of free speech by the media and individuals. President Rajapaksa has also appointed family members to

**Languages:** Sinhala 74%; Tamil 18%; English widely used

**Religions:** Buddhist 70%; Hindu 13%; Muslim 10%; Christian 7%; unspecified .04%

**Life Expectancy at Birth:** female 80 years; male 73 years

**Literacy:** 91.2%

**Gross Domestic Product:** 6.4% GDP growth. per capita GDP in purchasing power parity \$5,942

**Inflation:** 9.2%

**Unemployment:** 5.1%

**Labor Force:** Agriculture 32%, industry 26%, services 42.4%

**Exports:** Garments, tea, spices, rubber, gems and jewelry, refined petroleum, fish and coconuts/coconut products

**Destination of Exports:** U.S. 19.8%, U.K. 9.2%, Italy 5%, Germany 5%, India 6.5%, Belgium 4.4%

**Sources:** *The Economist Intelligence Unit; CIA, The World Factbook; Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics*

<sup>9</sup> David Rampton and Asanga Weilikala, "The Politics of the South," Asia Foundation Sri Lanka Strategic Conflict Assessment 2005 Series, 2005, at [http://www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/SL\\_Politics\\_of\\_the\\_South.pdf](http://www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/SL_Politics_of_the_South.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> "Banyan: The Uphill Road." *The Economist*, June 22, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "2012 Human Rights Report: Sri Lanka," 2012.

high ranking government positions. Human rights groups say the government has also killed, threatened, or detained human rights defenders, and remains non-transparent.<sup>12</sup>

## Sri Lanka's Economy

Sri Lanka's economy mainly relies on the services sector, and has a thriving tourism market. It additionally relies on agriculture and, to a lesser extent, industry, with the largest exports being garments, tea, spices, rubber, gems and jewelry, refined petroleum, fish, and coconuts/coconut products. Nearly 20% of the nation's exports reach the United States, though other large trading partners include neighboring India and several European Union nations.<sup>13</sup> Rajapaksa has identified improving the investment climate in Sri Lanka as a priority. Large trade and balance of payments deficits remain a concern. Other presidential economic priorities reportedly include rural and infrastructure development.

Sri Lanka and the United States have an important bilateral economic relation. The U.S. Department of State notes:

The United States is Sri Lanka's second-biggest market for garments, taking almost 40% of total garment exports. United States exports to Sri Lanka were estimated at \$302 million for 2011, consisting primarily of wheat, aircraft and parts, machinery and mechanical appliances, plastics, and medical and scientific equipment.<sup>14</sup>

India remains the largest source of foreign investment in Sri Lanka, with direct investments of over \$1 billion in the last ten years.<sup>15</sup> Other large investors include Taiwan, Canada, the Virgin Islands, Netherlands, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia.<sup>16</sup>

## Human Rights and War Crimes

Colombo has faced criticism for the way it has addressed alleged domestic human rights violations.<sup>17</sup> The government has been accused by the international community of favoring the Sinhalese people, and doing little to promote equal political voice and economic opportunities for its Tamil population.<sup>18</sup>

The human rights abuses that the Sri Lankan government has been accused of include control over the media and harassment of journalists,<sup>19</sup> sudden "disappearances" in the forms of arrests or abductions of Tamil sympathizers, the military's monitoring and control of Tamil populations in the north and eastern provinces, and insufficient government interest in investigating the location and status of former Tamil militants, despite family requests. Abuses against women have also increased in recent years.<sup>20</sup> Peaceful protests and supporters are often punished for what the

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<sup>12</sup> "World Report 2013," *Sri Lanka*. Human Rights Watch, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> "Sri Lanka," *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> "U.S. Relations With Sri Lanka," Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, October 24, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> "India's Investments in Sri Lanka Topped \$1 Billion Since 2003," *The Economic Times*, May 17, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> "Sri Lanka Gets US\$218mn FDI in First Quarter 2013," *Lanka Business Online*, May 14, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> "War Without Witness in Sri Lanka," 2013, <http://www.warwithoutwitness.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Subramanian, Samanth, "For Sri Lanka, More Empty Words," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> "Sri Lanka," Freedom House, March 12, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> "Sri Lanka: Security Forces Still Employ Torture and Rape, Rights Group Says," *The New York Times*, February



government views unfavorably, and although some actions have been taken in the past by the Sri Lankan governments, they are viewed as having been ineffective.<sup>21</sup>

On March 21, 2013, with support from the United States and India, the United Nations Human Rights Council voted to pass a resolution which is

critical of the Sri Lankan government's failure to take action to stop ongoing human rights violations and calling for an investigation into abuses committed during and in the aftermath of the country's 26-year civil war. Despite a significant campaign by the Sri Lankan government to prevent its passage, twenty-five countries voted in support of the resolution while thirteen countries opposed and eight abstained.<sup>22</sup>

The non-binding resolution has faced criticism due to its relatively weak nature. It "encourages" Sri Lanka to take action, and, while it discusses human rights violations, it does not address the need for international investigations into the conflict.

Regardless of the international community's fears of future conflict, Colombo has dismissed and continues to criticize international actions deeming them unfair. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that "Colombo pushed back against the U.S., forcefully rejecting the resolution and saying it plays down the country's efforts to rebuild Tamil areas and to promote reconciliation between the country's Sinhalese majority and its Tamil minority." The envoy for the Human Rights Council stressed the strength of Sri Lankan domestic policies, and accused the international community of indifference.<sup>23</sup>

## Geopolitical Context

Sri Lanka is situated near strategically important sea lanes that transit the Indian Ocean. These sea lanes link the energy rich Persian Gulf with the economies of East and Southeast Asia. Recent developments demonstrate to some observers that the maritime strategic dimension of the Indo-Pacific is increasingly integrating the Indian and Pacific Ocean littoral regions into a more unified strategic arena.

## Sri Lanka-India Relations

Sri Lanka and India share close longstanding historical and cultural ties.<sup>24</sup> India's native Tamil populations feel kinship with Sri Lanka's Tamils. Recently, India, along with the United States, has been an active voice for reconciliation, and fair elections within the international community. Although India has and continues to be a strong economic partner of Sri Lanka, the connection between the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka and the native Tamil populations in India have been a factor in relations between Tamil and Sinhalese ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.<sup>25</sup>

The relationship is also aggravated by massive refugee populations. India has played host to large number of Tamil refugees, both during and post the Sri Lankan civil war. In late 2012 the Indian government estimated that more than 100,000 Tamil refugees reside in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, which shares a common language and a maritime border, at the closest points, of about 40

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2013.

<sup>21</sup> "2011 Human Rights Reports: Sri Lanka," U.S. Department of State, May 24, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> "Resolution on Abuses in Sri Lanka Welcome but Not Strong Enough," Freedom House, March 21, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Stancati, Margharita, "Sri Lanka to Face Rights Investigation," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> "Sri Lanka Enjoys Good Relations with India: Mahinda Rajapaksa," *The Economic Times*, April 22, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> "Anti-Lanka UN Resolution Adopted, India Makes No Amendments," *The Times of India*, March 21, 2013.

miles away. Of this figure, 68,000 refugees remain in camps operated by the Indian government, while 32,000 live outside of the refugee camps. Although living conditions in the refugee camps are poor, only 5,000 refugees have returned to their native Sri Lanka after the declared end of the civil war, regardless of UNHCR's assistance.

Recent contentions have risen over the Palk Strait, a strait between the southern tip of India's state of Tamil Nadu, and the northern tip of Sri Lanka, in which fishermen from both nations compete for limited resources. Sri Lankans have accused Indian fisherman of encroaching into their waters, while Indian fisherman accuse Sri Lankan naval vessels of threatening behavior, including damage of vessels, robbery of stocks, and abuse against the fishermen. The dispute stands as a piece of a larger long-standing grudge between the native Tamil Indians who empathize with the defeated Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka, and their mistrust and anger against the Sinhalese dominant government.<sup>26</sup>

Despite differences, India and Sri Lanka have a close relationship through commercial interests, the growing tourism industry, educational cooperation, and migrant workers as well as mutual cultural and religious interests.<sup>27</sup> India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner.

## **Sri Lanka-China Relations**

China and Sri Lanka have developed increasingly close ties in recent years. In the last five years, China has invested heavily in Sri Lanka's defense and security. This comes in addition to Beijing's promises for assistance in other scientific and militaristic endeavors, including maritime, satellite and space technology programs.<sup>28</sup> Some view China's initiatives in Sri Lanka as part of a "string of pearls" strategy by China to gain access to ports to help it secure its interests along the sea lanes which link the energy rich Persian Gulf with China's economic and trade centers on the east coast of China.<sup>29</sup> Others are less concerned by China's investment.

Chinese assistance is viewed by some as having played a key role in enabling Sri Lanka to win its civil war against the LTTE. According to an Operations Officer of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center:

The most decisive factor enhancing Sri Lanka's ability to combat the LTTE involved significant economic and military aid from China.... China's aid enabled the Sri Lankan government to attain the military superiority needed to defeat the LTTE.... In exchange for the aid, China received development rights for port facilities and other investments.<sup>30</sup>

China has assisted Sri Lanka with a series of very large infrastructure development projects, a second international airport, a telecommunications tower in Colombo, and the reconstruction of highway A9 between Kandy and Jaffna. China is also assisting with railways and a \$1.3 billion coal power plant development. It was announced in April 2013 that China would lend Sri Lanka \$200 million to finance part of the Matara-Kataragama railway.

Sri Lanka's disapproval of the West's and India's focus on human rights within the country, has led some to conclude that these foreign influences are waning in Sri Lanka relative to Chinese influence. Some in strategic circles in New Delhi are increasingly concerned that China may be

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<sup>26</sup> "Trawling for Trouble," *The Economist*, April 6, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> "India-Sri Lanka Relations," Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, February 2013.

<sup>28</sup> "China to Train Sri Lankan Army, to Provide Military Technology," *The Indian Express*, May 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Dodamgoda, Dinesh, "Is Sri Lanka Becoming A Key Player In China's String Of Pearls?" *The Sunday Leader*, July 30, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, Neil, "Understanding Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 2010.

seeking to gain strategic positions around India in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. India and China have unresolved border disputes that date back to their 1962 border war. China remains a large trading partner of Sri Lanka with \$3.2 billion in bilateral trade in 2011. Comparatively, Sri Lankan exports to the United States totaled \$2.1 billion in 2011 while United States exports to Sri Lanka totaled \$302 million in 2011.

## Development Factors

Sri Lanka holds the status as the only South Asian nation with a relatively high Human Development Index score, demonstrating the focus of government policies on social factors. In particular, the island nation has excelled in health and education, though concerns about the environment and the nation's susceptibility to natural disasters remain significant. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Health targets maternal and child health problems, malaria, hypertension, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS, has pledged itself to the improvement of preventative health programs. It provides universal healthcare for all Sri Lankan citizens, though studies have revealed that there is still a priority for healthcare assistance to high income groups.<sup>31</sup>

## Environment and Natural Disasters

Sri Lanka possesses one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. Conservation International, a U.S.-based organization focused on environmental research, policy, and field work, notes that, "Sri Lanka alone may be home to as many as 140 endemic species of amphibians. The region also houses important populations of Asian elephants, Indian tigers, and the endangered lion-tailed macaque. Freshwater fish endemism is extremely high as well, with over 140 native species."<sup>32</sup>

Grouped along with the Western Ghats region, which extends through the western peninsula of India, Sri Lanka remains one of the thirty-four "biodiversity hotspots" in the world;<sup>33</sup> one of the regions that are known to house important medical plants, different grain sources, spices, and genetic resources of plants and animals. According to the Australian Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities,

Biodiversity hotspots are areas that support natural ecosystems that are largely intact and where native species and communities associated with these ecosystems are well represented. They are also areas with a high diversity of locally endemic species, which are species that are not found or are rarely found outside the hotspot.

They are also defined by the risk of destruction that they face, and the lack of conservation efforts due to their high monetary potential.<sup>34</sup>

The rapid threat of environmental degradation is very real for the South Asian nation. Sri Lanka's ecosystem has been under immense strain, with a lack of regulation of the biodiversity. Today, the nation's remaining forests only account for 1.5% of the original, due to farms, loggers, poachers, population pressures, and fishing. The United Nations Development Programme reports that

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<sup>31</sup> "Private Health Providers Are NOT More Efficient, Accountable or Medically Effective," Global Health Check, March 28, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> "Western Ghats and Sri Lanka: Overview," Conservation International, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Hirimuthugodage, Dilani, "Biodiversity as a Cornerstone of Sustainable Development: A Sri Lankan Perspective," *Talking Economics*, May 2013.

<sup>34</sup> "Biodiversity Hotspots," Australian Government: The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

between the twenty years of 1990 and 2010, Sri Lanka's forests have been reduced by an alarming and unsustainable 20.9%.<sup>35</sup> Often the use of the forests and its biodiversity is illegal, but continues to occur. These environmental degradation processes have taken many forms in Sri Lanka, and has altered the terrain of the disaster-vulnerable nation.

Sri Lanka has had a susceptibility to a number of natural disasters due to its geographic position.<sup>36</sup> A majority of the disasters are hydro-climatological, taking the form of cyclones, tsunamis, landslides, droughts and floods.<sup>37</sup> According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in the last 34 years, the death toll due to natural calamities has remained over 37,000.<sup>38</sup> One of the deadliest recorded tsunamis hit India, Thailand, Sumatra, and Sri Lanka in December 2004, contributing to this massive figure. U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reports that the 2004 tsunami claimed over 31,000 lives in Sri Lanka with its 9.0 scale earthquake, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that displacement due to threat of tsunamis, earthquakes, and other natural phenomenon is also common, noting that, "as recently as November 2010, a monsoon triggered devastating floods across parts of the country, affecting close to 1.2 million people"<sup>39</sup>

### Sri Lanka Chronology<sup>40</sup>

5 <sup>th</sup> century BC	Sinhalese emerge as dominant group on Ceylon.
3 <sup>rd</sup> century BC	Tamil migration from India begins.
1505	Portuguese arrive in Ceylon.
1658	Dutch replace Portuguese influence.
1796	British influence in Ceylon begins.
1815	British begin to bring Tamil laborers from India to Ceylon.
1948	Ceylon gains independence.
1949	Tamil plantation workers disenfranchised.
1958	Anti-Tamil riots.
1971	Sinhalese Marxist uprising.
1972	Ceylon changes its name to Sri Lanka.
1976	LTTE formed.
1983	Separatist civil war begins.
1987	Government forces push LTTE back to Jaffna and Indian peacekeeping forces are deployed to Sri Lanka.
1988	Left wing nationalist Sinhalese JVP campaign against Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement.

<sup>35</sup> "International Human Development Indicators—United Nations Development Programme," International Human Development Indicators, United Nations Development Programme, April 10, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> "Asia Most at Risk from Natural Disasters," Global, IRIN News, May 31, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Zubair, Lareef, and Ruvini Perera et al., "Fine Scale Natural Hazard Risk and Vulnerability Identification Informed by Climate in Sri Lanka," International Research Institute for Climate Prediction, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> "Humanitarian News and Analysis," *IRINnews*. U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, November 1, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> "The December 26, 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Initial Findings on Tsunami Sand Deposits, Damage, and Inundation in Sri Lanka," *Tsunamis and Earthquakes*, January 2005. "Humanitarian News and Analysis," *IRINnews*. U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, November 1, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Much of this chronology is drawn from "Sri Lanka Timeline," *BBC News*, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>.

1990	Indian troops leave Sri Lanka as conflict escalates.
1991	LTTE responsible for assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.
1995-2001	War escalates.
2002	A Norwegian-mediated ceasefire is signed.
2004	Karuna leads a split within the LTTE and a tsunami kills 30,000.
2005	Then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa wins presidential election.
2006	Fighting between government forces and LTTE resumes.
2008	Government pursues military option to end conflict.
2009	Kilinochchi falls to government forces as international concern over plight of civilians grows and the LTTE is defeated.
2010	President Rajapaksa wins reelection by a wide margin and his ruling coalition wins a substantial victory in parliament. The constitution is changed to allow Rajapaksa to seek an unlimited number of terms as president.
2011-2012	U.N. calls for international investigation into possible war crimes, committed by both warring parties. Sri Lankan government claims the report to be biased, and says that the measure violates its national sovereignty.
2013	Groups including U.N. Human Rights Council and Amnesty international pass resolutions and recommendations urging international attention and credible investigations into war crimes by the Sri Lankan government. Colombo denies all allegations.

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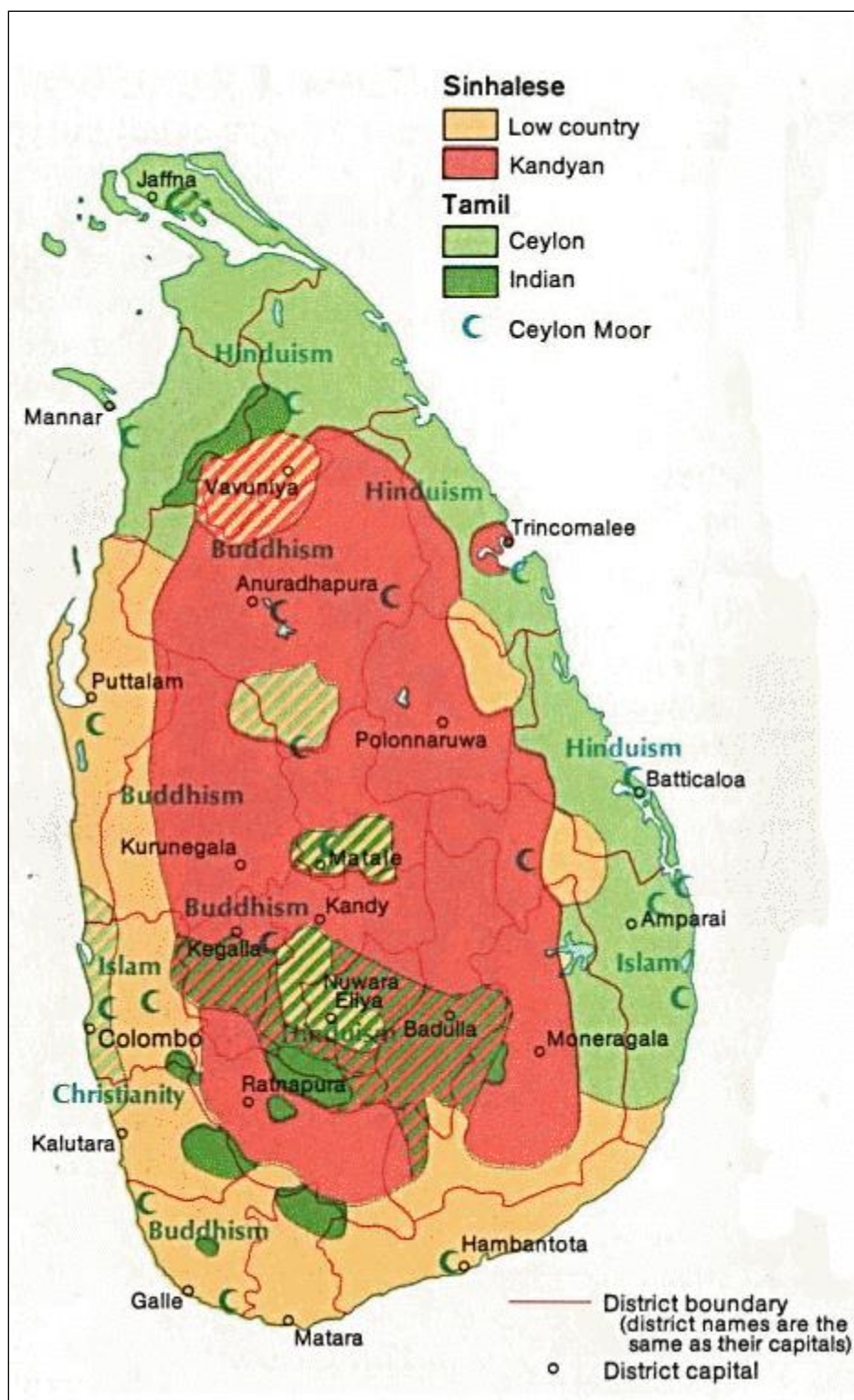
Figure I. Map of Sri Lanka



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.



Figure 2. Ethnic and Religious Divide of Sri Lanka



Source: University of Pennsylvania.

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